Contrastive Analysis of Similes with Dog Image in English and Vietnamese and Implications

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ABSTRACT

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Studies on dog images in idiomatic languages in different languages always receive a lot of attention from researchers. The present study examines the similarities of 21 English-Vietnamese dog similes and tries to account for the differences based on Hofstede's model (2001). The analysis results show that the image of the dog in each language has unique cultural characteristics due to the influence of factors such as geographical circumstances and customs. While the image of a dog appearing in English similes has both positive meaning (38%) and negative meaning (62%), Vietnamese similes record a full dominance in negative meanings (100%). Besides, the semantic symbols of similes with dog elements in Vietnamese and English have interesting similarities. Understanding the semantic characteristics of words for dogs in English and Vietnamese similes contributes to discovering new things about the life, customs, practices, culture, and thinking of British and Vietnamese people.

Introduction

Language contributes to the formation of culture and transports and preserves culture. Brown (1994) argues that a language is a part of a culture and a culture is a part of a language; the two are so intricately intertwined that one cannot separate the two without losing the meaning of either language or culture (p.165). Language has a widespread influence on social life because it is a regular and inevitable phenomenon in humans. During the process of contact with the natural world, people accumulate their knowledge and experience about that world through language. Faced with an extremely rich and diverse world, they have created different forms of comparison to evaluate and specifically describe both the natural and social environments. In the process, they found many different linguistic methods to express degrees of comparison, including similes.

Among the similes, the similes about animals account for a very rich amount. Among the animals that are close to humans, it is impossible not to mention dogs. The image of a dog appears quite a lot in English and Vietnamese similes. This is also a very attractive topic for linguists and cultural researchers. In the culture and spirituality of some ethnic groups, dogs are animals closely attached to humans with honored qualities such as loyalty, intelligence, and care for their owners... Dogs are considered as close friends of humans, dogs guard people's homes, and there are even places where dogs are worshiped at temples and shrines. However, the image of dogs in many cultures is also associated with bad, unlucky or disrespectful things in society. Because people are familiar with this animal, they use it often in their language expressions; therefore, similes with the " dog " image play an important role in British and Vietnamese people's lives.

The objective of this study includes analyzing and comparing similes containing dog images in English and Vietnamese to understand their usage and meaning in the two languages. At the same time, the study identifies similarities and differences in how dog images are used in the similes of the two languages, thereby finding out the cultural and linguistic characteristics of each country, and evaluating the importance of dog images in conveying cultural meanings and values through language. Therefore, the study proposes directions for development and application in translating, teaching, and learning English and Vietnamese based on understanding the similarities and differences between the similes of the two languages.

Literature review

Simile

In the English language, according to the Oxford Dictionary, the simile is "a word or phrase that compares something to something else, using the words *like* or *as*. Cambridge Dictionary defines simile as "a form of expression using 'like' or 'as', in which one thing is compared to another which it only resembles in one or a small number of ways." Huu Chanh (2021) concludes that simile is sometimes confused with metaphors in some cultures since they hold the functions of comparisons. In other words, an image or idea means one thing in a particular culture but refers to another thing in different cultures. According to Hussein and Sawalha (2016), a simile is a figure of speech that compares two different things or people to identify similarities or qualities that they share by using the word "like" or "as" to make the comparison. Similes are generally more easily identified because of the use of the words "as" and/or "like," and metaphors are figures of speech used mainly in the analysis of literary texts. Similes can be expressed through some frames, namely [As+Adj+As+Noun], [Adj+like+Noun], and [Adj+as+Noun].

In the Vietnamese language, Hoang Van Hanh (2003) believes that "simile is a stable combination of words, originating from comparison, with symbolic meaning." Regarding morphology-structure, in similes, the component represents the comparison relationship, and the comparison (like B) is a mandatory and stable part of the surface structure and deep structure. Words denoting comparisons (B) often describe typical images. The compared side t in the simile "t like B" is mandatory in the deep structure but unstable in the surface structure - that is, in some cases, t can be hidden. The comparative structure like B has the following three types of meaning structure: t like B (like B denotes the degree of t), t like B (like B denotes the manner of t), and like B (like B denotes the attribute of A). B's double layer of meaning is in such a way that B makes the similes symbolic; there is no opposition between the literal and figurative meaning of B. According to Hoang Kim Ngoc (2009), the simile compares two

things, A and B, that have some common sign in common. A is an unknown thing, thanks to B, the reader knows A or understands more about A. A simile is also called rhetorical comparison or visual comparison, which is a comparison that is not of the same kind, not of the same general category, as long as there is some cognitive or psychological similarity (p.84).

Previous studies

Bachrun (2023) studies metaphors about dogs in proverbial expressions in English and Indonesian and examines the semantic aspect in both languages. The findings show that 20 concepts were found to be the target domain of the vocabulary "dog" in the proverbs analyzed in this study. These include a terrible person; a lucky talent; a bitter person; a hungry soul; a cornered person; a criminal; a best friend; a fool; a threat; a lucky talent; someone who is not appreciated; a strong person, dishonesty; brave nature; modest upbringing; decisive significance; cognitive aspect; gratefulness; a coward. The study concluded that the way English and Indonesians perceive the term "dog" is symbolically different. However, both speech groups preserved "dog" vocabulary and used general ideas as their target areas.

In their study, Farghal and Haider (2023) take a closer look at dog expressions in English in terms of taxonomy, structure, attitude, semantics, and translatability into Arabic. Their study shows that the richness of expressions about dogs in English qualifies the conceptual metaphor "humans are dogs" in a status equivalent to the universal conceptual metaphor "humans are animals". The data in this study included 110 English dog expressions. Based on the analysis of these expressions, the results showed that 91.25% showed negative characteristics and habits of dogs towards humans despite the highly regarded position that dogs currently hold in the world and Anglo-American culture. Common idioms dominate the data (72.72%), followed by similes (13.64%) and sayings (13.64%).

The research by Ranti et al. (2023) aims to compare the differences and similarities in the meaning of proverbs in Japanese and Indonesian using the words dog and cat. This research was designed with a qualitative descriptive research design. The method used to describe research objects in words. The data for this research are 143 proverbs in Indonesian and Japanese that use the words 犬 (dog) and 猫 (cat) with the analytical technique used is contrastive analysis. Based on the results of data analysis, it was found that there are differences and similarities between Japanese proverbs and Indonesian proverbs that use the words 犬 (dog) and 猫 (cat).

In Vietnam, several studies talk about the image of dogs in Vietnamese idioms and compare them with English and other languages. Typical examples include the research of Le Thi Minh Thao (2014). This research was conducted to point out some differences between English and Vietnamese idioms containing the word "dog," and the specific features of English and Vietnamese culture about dogs lie behind the similarities and differences between English and Vietnamese idioms. Research shows that English and Vietnamese idioms that use the image of a dog have both negative and positive meanings. However, positive meanings are more prominent in English idioms, while Vietnamese idioms record a dominance in negative meanings. Another contrastive study by Hung (2024) analyzes the symbolic meanings of "dog" in Chinese and Vietnamese idioms. The findings reveal that "dog" has two similar symbolic meanings in both Chinese and Vietnamese, with 08 distinctive meanings merely found in the former and 05 merely in the latter, posing difficulties for Vietnamese learners in the acquisition of Chinese idioms containing "dog". This study is expected to help learners rectify language interference errors to better understand and use Chinese idioms.

Thus, it can be seen that there have been quite a few studies on proverbs and idioms that use dog images in English and Vietnamese, but specific research on similes that use dog images in English and Vietnamese, from which cross-cultural cross-linguistic comparison is still a gap that our research hopes to fill.

Research questions

The study focuses on two main research questions:

1. What are the similarities between English and Vietnamese similes about the dog from cross-cultural perspectives?

2. What is the difference between English and Vietnamese similes about the dog from cross-cultural perspectives?

Methods

The main purpose of the research is to determine the similarities and differences between the two languages , English - and Vietnamese, that are compared. In addition, an equally important purpose is to clarify the cultural characteristics related to those two languages. The results of research analysis linking the relationship between language and culture not only help clarify the characteristics of language and culture but also provide significant insights into the type of language and culture. Additionally, it helps avoid shock in intercultural communication and has many other foreign language and intercultural English teaching applications. The research method used is the cross-cultural contrastive method. The present study aims to explore the differences in semantic features and syntactic features reflected by English and Vietnamese dog similes under the guidance of part of Geert Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory (2001). Hofstede (2001) set the criterion of correspondence of the main meaning that English and Vietnamese equivalents of dog similes convey. Similes often put across the same message but utilize different images to convey it. These differences in imagery reflect the differences in ways of life and types of society, including different social standards, in the selected three nations. Many similes are common to all or almost all European languages, but there are also language- and culture-specific similes that do not have a corresponding equivalent in other languages.

The following three types of interlingual equivalents will be distinguished based on Geert Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory (2001).

Full Equivalence (FE): The category of full equivalence will include similes with the same semantic, structural, and lexical content and figurative and pragmatic meaning. Similes will be considered fully equivalent even when they manifest some minor grammatical discrepancies explained by the different grammar structures of the target language. Small inconsistencies in prepositions, for example, and slight morphological and syntactic differences will be disregarded.

Relative Equivalence (RE): Relative equivalents are those similes that are identical in terms of meaning but manifest some minor differences with respect to form. These expressions may have slight lexical, grammatical, or lexico-grammatical differences, but at the same time, they still satisfy all levels of equivalence. Commonly, there are differences in open word classes, i.e., nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs.

Zero-Equivalence (ZE): Zero-equivalence, termed also lacunarity, refers to a situation when no equivalent can be found for a given simile in another language. In other words, the other language lacks a simile or a saying that would convey the same meaning, even in different words.

Subjects and scope of research

In this study, we used English and Vietnamese as survey subjects. These are two languages that are very different in type and language family, belonging to two cultures with different European and Asian characteristics. However, due to the ups and downs of history, these two languages and two cultures have had interactions for centuries. Therefore, the comparative study of multiple meanings is even more meaningful in terms of language and culture and hopefully has implications for theory and application. Our research is limited to a small group of similes whose clauses are compared to the dog of the two languages , English and Vietnamese, with the purpose of clarifying the similarities and differences between them.

We chose 21 corresponding similes in the two languages English and Vietnamese as the corpus for comparative analysis. English similes are the base language, and Vietnamese similes are the language used for comparison. Our exploited corpus is mainly based on dictionaries compiled by reputable authors.

Research data

English data

According to statistics from the BNC linguistics corpus in Bakalova (2008), the similes that use the image of a dog account for 7.6% of the total number of comparative idioms about animals (1751 similes). In this study, we searched from three reputable English dictionary sources: Cambridge Idiom Dictionary, Collin Dictionary, and Oxford Idiom Dictionary, thereby finding 21 similes that use dog images:

1. Like a dog with two tails
2. As sick as a dog
3. As loyal/ *faithful* as a dog
4. Happy like a dog with a bone
5. Work like a dog
6. Like a dog's breakfast
7. Like a dog on/in heat
8. Treat like a dog
9. As selfish as the dog in the manger
10. As friendly as a golden retriever
11. As lazy as a dog
12. As clean as a hound's tooth
13. As sad as a hound dog's eye
14. Like a dirty dog
15. Dressed up like a dog's dinner
16. As tenacious as a bulldog
17. As wet as a dog's nose
18. Like a dog life
19. Die like a dog
20. As mean as a junkyard dog
21. Sleep like a dog

Vietnamese data

The Vietnamese language corpus was selected from two dictionaries: Vu Ngoc Phan's "Vietnamese proverbs, idioms, and folk songs" (2005) and Hoang Van Hanh's "Story telling of idioms and proverbs" (1988; 1990).

The results found were 21 similes below:

1. Nói dai như chó nhai giẻ rách (Talking like a dog chewing a rag)
2. Cằn nhằn như chó cắn ma (Nagging like a dog biting a ghost)
3. Tiu nghỉu như chó cụp đuôi (Sad as a dog with its tail between its legs)
4. Ngu như chó (Stupid as a dog)
5. Chạy như chó phải pháo (Running like a dog seeing the firecrackers)
6. Bẩn như chó (Dirty as a dog)
7. Dại như chó (Foolish as a dog)
8. Nhục như chó (Humiliated as a dog)
9. Bơ vơ như chó lạc nhà (Alone as a dog getting lost)
10. Chạy rông như chó dái (Running around like an adult male dog)
11. Chực như chó chực cối (Waiting like a dog waiting for a mortar)
12. Chửi như chó ăn vã mắm (Cursing like a dog eating fish sauce)
13. Đen như mõm chó (Black as a dog's muzzle)
14. Lang lảng như chó cái trốn con (Wandering around like a mother dog hiding from her puppies)
15. Làu bàu như chó hóc xương (Grumbling like a dog choking on a bone)
16. Loanh quanh như chó nằm chổi (Wandering around like a dog lying on a broom)
17. Nhanh như chó chạy ngoài đồng (Fast as a dog running in the field)
18. Lơ láo như chó thấy thóc (Negligent like a dog seeing grain)
19. Ngồi như chó ngó tát ao (Sitting like a dog watching bailing water out of the pond
20. Ngồi xó ró như chó tiền rưỡi (Sitting in a corner like a half-dollar dog)
21. Ngay lưng như chó trèo chạn (Lazy as a dog climbing a cupboard)

Findings

Dog similes in English

Definition of "dog" in English dictionary

In the Cambridge, Collins, and Oxford dictionaries, the noun "dog" has the following four meaning classes:

- a common animal with four legs, fur, and a tail, often kept as a pet or trained for work, for example, hunting or guarding

- an unattractive woman (derogatory expression, slang)

- a man who is dishonest or does something evil (derogatory expression, slang)

- a thing of low quality; a failure

Structure of dog similes in English

Table 1.

Structure of dog similes in English

Structure			
As + Adjective + As + Noun/Noun phrase	**Verb + Like + Noun**	**Like + Noun**	**Adjective + Like + Noun**
• As sick as a dog • As loyal/ faithful as a dog • As selfish as the dog in the manger • As friendly as a golden retriever • As lazy as a dog • As sad as a hound dog's eye • As tenacious as a bulldog • As wet as a dog's nose • As mean as a junkyard dog	• Work like a dog • Treat like a dog • Die like a dog • Sleep like a dog	• Like a dog with two tails • Like a dog's breakfast • Like a dog on/in heat • Like a dirty dog • Like a dog life	• Happy like a dog with a bone • Dressed up like a dog's dinner • Clean as a hound's tooth
9/21 (43%)	**4/21 (19%)**	**5/21 (24%)**	**3/21 (14%)**

It can be seen from Table 1 that the majority of similes use the structure As + Adjective + As + Noun/Noun phrase with 9/21 similes, accounting for 43%. English similes commonly use this structure to create vivid comparisons by linking quality with a relatable image. It strengthens descriptive language and conveys meaning concisely. The Like + Noun structure accounts for 24% with 5 similes. The structure Verb + Like + Noun accounts for 19% with 4 similes. There are 3 similes (13%) using the structure Adjective + Like + Noun. The structures used in English similes are generally similar to those in other languages. A simile has four key components. They are the topic or tenor, the vehicle, the event, and the comparator.

Meaning of dog similes in English

Table 2.

Meaning of dog similes in English

No	English similes	Meaning	Positive (+) Negative (-)
1	Like a dog with two tails	To be tremendously happy	+
2	As sick as a dog	Very ill	-
3	As faithful as a dog	To be loyal and devoted	+
4	Like a dog with a bone	To be fixated on a particular topic	+
5	Work like a dog	To work very hard	+
6	Like a dog's breakfast	To be messy or poorly done	-
7	Like a dog on/in heat	Very energetic and enthusiastic, especially when sexually aroused	+
8	Treat like a dog	*To treat one with disrespect or contempt*	-
9	As selfish as the dog in the manger	People tend to selfishly keep things that they do not really need or want so that others may not use or enjoy them.	-
10	As friendly as a golden retriever	To be extroverted, easily excitable, and happy about life (golden retriever is a kind of dogs	+
11	As lazy as a dog	Very lazy	-
12	As clean as a hound's tooth	Very clean, very innocent	+
13	As sad as a hound dog's eye	Very sad, pitiful	-
14	Like a dirty dog	To be deemed to be despicable or contemptible	-
15	Dressed up like a dog's dinner	To wear very formal or decorative clothes in a way that attracts attention	-
16	As tenacious as a bulldog	To be tough, tenacious, and gets things done, especially in the face of adversity	+
17	As wet as a dog's nose	Very wet	-
18	Like a dog life	A difficult, boring, and unhappy life	-
19	Die like a dog	To die in a painful and shameful way	-
20	As mean as a junkyard dog.	A very mean and combative person willing to use any means necessary in defense of something	-
21	Sleep like a dog	To sleep in a way that one cannot be easily woken up.	-

Analysis of positive and negative meanings of dog similes in English shows the appearance of positive and negative meanings, in which negative meanings dominate 62% with 13/21 positive meanings. Extremely more modest with 8/21 similes (38%). In English, dog-related similes carry both positive and negative meanings because dogs embody diverse characteristics, from loyalty to aggression. Positive similes like "as faithful as a dog" or "work like a dog" highlight dedication and hard work. However, negative dog similes are more common, such as "as sick as a dog" or "like a dog's life," which emphasize hardship or unappealing traits.

Table 3.

Examples of dog similes in English

No	English examples
1	He was like a dog with two tails when he was given the first prize.
2	*As sick as a dog*, he can't walk without a stick
3	His old butler was *as faithful as a dog*.
4	I was late once, and my boss is *like a dog with a bone*, bringing it up every chance she gets.
5	He *worked like a dog* to earn money to raise his family.
6	He's made these accounts *like a real dog's breakfast*.
7	She was super hot and looking at me *like a dog on heat*!
8	She *treats me like a dog*.
9	She is *as selfish as the dog* in the manger
10	Amy's welcoming smile made her as *friendly as a golden retriever*, instantly putting people at ease.
11	I wish you would motivate yourself a bit more. Stop being so idle. I swear that you're *as lazy as a dog*.
12	This house needs to be *clean as a hound's tooth* before Pop comes to visit.
13	His blue eye is always *sad as a hound dog's*.
14	He tried to steal my money, *like a dirty dog*!
15	The dress code was smart, but Linda came wearing a full-length ball gown! She was *dressed up like a dog's dinner*!
16	He was *as tenacious as a bulldog*.
17	I stepped onto the carpet *like a healthy dog's nose*.
18	After 3 years of Covid-19, we live *like a dog life*.
19	The film begins with our hero stealing cars and ends with him *dying like a dog* in the street.
20	He is *as mean as a junkyard dog*.
21	I had a wonderfully restful night as I *slept like a dog*.

These above examples containing dog similes in English reflect a broad view of dogs' characteristics, illustrating both admirable and unfavorable qualities. Positive dog similes, such as "as faithful as a dog" or "work like a dog," emphasize dedication, loyalty, and resilience, traits valued in animals and people. In contrast, negative similes like "as sick as a dog" or "like a dog life" often highlight weakness, misfortune, or decline. This range of expressions mirrors the complex human-dog relationship: while dogs are cherished for loyalty and companionship, cultural history sometimes associates them with dirtiness, illness, or hardship, explaining the prevalence of negative imagery. It can be concluded that dog similes can be used to create vivid imagery or draw surprising connections between two related or unrelated things.

Dog similes in Vietnamese

Definition of "dog" in Vietnamese dictionary

In Vietnamese, three words, "chó," "cẩu," and "khuyển," exist at the same time, all referring to this animal. Among them, "cẩu" and "khuyển" are Chinese loanwords used with a lower frequency than "chó", which is a pure Vietnamese word. In "Vietnamese dictionary," by Hoang Phe (2011), explains that dog is a noun, with two basic meanings:

- First, it refers to animals that are often raised to keep the house or hunt or eat meat;

- Second, it refers to a despicable person and is also used as a scolding word.

In particular, the second meaning belongs to the metaphorical meaning layer; from the source domain of dogs, this animal's evil and despicable characteristics are mapped onto the target domain, indicating people who lack personality are condemned by society and scorned.

Structure of Vietnamese similes

Table 4.

Structure of dog similes in Vietnamese

Structure			
Adjective + As + Noun	**Verb + Like + Noun**	**Verb + Like + Clause**	**Adjective + Like + Clause**
• Stupid as a dog • Dirty as a dog • Foolish as a dog • Humiliated as a dog • Black as a dog's snout	• Sitting in a corner like a half-dollar dog • Running around like an adult male dog	• Talking like a dog chewing rags • Running like a dog seeing the firecrackers • Waiting like a dog waiting for a mortar • Cursing like a dog eating fish sauce • Grumbling like a dog choking on a bone • Wandering around like a dog lying on a broom • Sitting like a dog looking at the pond • Wandering around like a female dog hiding from her children	• Sullen as a dog with its tail between its legs • Alone as a dog getting lost • Negligent as a dog seeing the grain • Lazy as a dog climbing a cupboard • Nagging as a dog biting a ghost • Fast as a dog running in the field
5/21 (24%)	**2/21 (9%)**	**8/21 (38%)**	**6/21 (29%)**

Dog similes in Vietnamese recorded the dominance of the comparative structure Verb + Like + Clause with 8/21 structures, accounting for 38%. This proves that even when comparing, Vietnamese people still prefer to use action verbs rather than property adjectives. The structures Adjective + Like + Clause and Adjective + As + Noun account for 29% and 24%, respectively. The use of comparative clauses instead of words and phrases is also worth noting. The comparative clause is a clause, accounting for 67%, compared to the comparative clause being a noun, accounting for 33%. This shows the thinking of Vietnamese people who want to describe detailed comparative images.

Meaning of dog similes in Vietnamese

Table 5.

Meaning of dog similes in Vietnamese

No	Similes	Meaning	Positive (+) Negative (-)
1	Nói dai như chó nhai giẻ rách (Talking like a dog chewing rags)	Talking over and over again, vociferously and persistently (about a certain issue)	_
2	Cằn nhằn như chó cắn ma (Nagging like a dog biting a ghost)	Nagging and persistent like a dog barking at night when it detects a shadow of a person lurking aimlessly	_
3	Tiu nghỉu như chó cụp đuôi (Sad as a dog with its tail between its legs)	Depressed and sad	_
4	Ngu như chó (Stupid as a dog)	Very stupid	_
5	Chạy như chó phải pháo (Running like a dog seeing the firecrackers)	Extremely fear	_
6	Bẩn như chó (Dirty as a dog)	1. Very dirty; 2. Stingy, stingy, selfish, narrow-minded	_
7	Dại như chó (Foolish as a dog)	Foolish	_
8	Nhục như con chó (Humiliated as a dog)	Extremely humiliating, like the dog's low status	_
9	Bơ vơ như chó lạc nhà (Alone as a dog getting lost)	Disappointed, lonely, tired and unable to determine what to do, where to go, or where to go	_
10	Chạy rông như chó dái (Running around like an adult male dog)	Wandering around looking all day, like a male dog looking for a mate during heat season	_
11	Chực như chó chực cối (Waiting like a dog waiting for a mortar)	Waiting to enjoy something	_
12	Chửi như chó ăn vã mắm (Cursing like a dog eating fish sauce)	Cursing a lot, cursing repeatedly and torrentially	_
13	Đen như mõm chó (Black as a dog's muzzle)	1. Black and smooth, wet; 2. Bad luck meets bad luck	_
14	Lang lảng như chó cái trốn con (Wandering around like a mother dog hiding from her puppies)	Avoiding and not wanting to meet anyone to avoid trouble, such as a mother dog hiding from her little puppies that are demanding to be breastfed	_
15	Làu bàu như chó hóc xương: (Grumbling like a dog choking on a bone)	Speaking softly, mumble in your mouth with anger and discomfort	_
16	Loanh quanh như chó nằm chổi (Wandering around like a dog lying on a broom)	Survey and consider the surrounding area before performing the main, central work (dogs often walk around a few times before lying on the broom)	_
17	Nhanh như chó chạy ngoài đồng (As fast as a dog running in the field)	Passing quickly (time)	_

18	Lơ láo như chó thấy thóc (Negligent like a dog seeing grain)	Be surprised but indifferent to things and things that have nothing to do with you	_
19	Ngồi như chó ngó tát ao (Sitting like a dog watching bailing water out of the pond)	Curious but don't understand anything	_
20	Ngồi xó ró như chó tiền rưỡi (Sitting in a corner like a half-dollar dog)	Sitting cowered, curled up as if there was no strength left, like the crouching style of a skinny dog (only worth half a day's worth of money)	_
21	Ngay lưng như chó trèo chạn (Lazy as a dog climbing a cupboard)	Lazy, refusing to work	_

Among the 21 Vietnamese similes selected for analysis, none have positive meanings. The fact that Vietnamese dog similes lack positive meanings largely due to cultural perspectives that differ from Western views. Traditionally, dogs in Vietnamese society have often symbolized less desirable qualities, such as dirtiness or aggressiveness, especially when roaming freely in rural areas. Expressions like "Nhục như con chó" (Humiliated as a dog) and "Đen như mõm chó" (Black as a dog's muzzle) convey misfortune, or disloyalty rather than the Western qualities of loyalty or devotion. Vietnamese similes reflect these cultural beliefs, so positive qualities like loyalty are often attributed to animals like buffaloes, which are valued for hard work and resilience, rather than dogs.

Table 6.

Examples of dog similes in Vietnamese

No	Vietnamese examples
1	*Nói dai như chó nhai giẻ rách*. Mọi người không ai muốn nghe đâu. (You are always talking like a dog chewing a rag. No one wants to listen to you.)
2	Có mỗi chuyện bé tí mà nói mãi, *cằn nhằn như chó cắn ma* ấy.(There's just a little thing that keeps talking, nagging like a dog biting a ghost.)
3	Bị mẹ mắng, thằng bé *tiu nghỉu như chó cụp đuôi*. (Being scolded by his mother, the boy was as depressed as a dog with his tail between his legs.)
4	Sao mày *ngu như chó* thế hả? (Why are you as stupid as a dog?)
5	Cứ mỗi lần gặp bà ta là anh ấy lại *chạy như chó phải pháo*. (Every time he sees her, he runs like a dog seeing the firecrackers.)
6	Cả tuần không chịu tắm gội, lão ta trông *bẩn như chó*. (He hadn't showered all week and looked as dirty as a dog.)
7	Thằng lớn lấy hết phần thông minh, còn thằng em thì *dại như chó*. (The older brother takes all the intelligence, but the younger brother is as foolish as a dog.)
8	Mình giống như một đứa ăn bám, mỗi tháng ngửa tay xin từng đồng, rồi bị chửi mắng, trách móc, *nhục như con chó*. (I'm like a freeloader; every month, I ask for every penny, then get scolded, blamed, and humiliated as a dog.)
9	Người mẹ gặp tai nạn, và hai đứa trẻ *bơ vơ như chó lạc nhà*. (The mother had an accident, and the two children were as alone as dogs getting lost.)
10	Nó không lúc nào chịu ngồi yên một chỗ, cả ngày *chạy rông như chó dái*. (He never sits still and runs around like an adult male dog all day.)

11	Làm thì ko làm, cứ ngồi đó *chực như chó chực cối*. (They don't do anything; they just sit there waiting like a dog waiting for a mortar.)
12	Đối với con dâu, bây giờ mẹ chồng không được *chửi như chó ăn vã mắm* đâu. (As for the daughter-in-law, now the mother-in-law is not allowed to curse like a dog eating fish sauce.)
13	"Sáng trăng em ngỡ tối trời/ Em ngồi em để cái sự đời em ra/ Sự đời như cái lá đa/ *Đen như mõm chó*, chém cha cái sự đời!" (A Vietnamese folk) (In the morning of the moon, I thought it was dark / I sat and let my life unfold / Life was like a banyan leaf / Black as a dog's snout, slashing life's fate!) (A Vietnamese folk)
14	Cậu ta không muốn gặp ai để tránh phiền toái, *lang lảng như chó cái trốn con*. (He didn't want to see anybody to avoid inconveniences, so he wandered around like a mother dog hiding from her puppies.)
15	Nó có cái tính hay giận, mà đã giận thì cứ *làu bàu như chó hóc xương*. (He has an angry personality, and when he's angry, he grumbles like a dog choking on a bone.)
16	Chưa trả được nợ thì khất, sao cứ *loanh quanh như chó nằm chổi* thế. (If you can't pay your debt, then beg, why do you keep wandering around like a dog lying on a broom?)
17	Thời gian trôi nhanh như chó chạy ngoài đồng. (Time passes quickly like a dog running in the field.)
18	Thấy kẻ cắp móc túi người ta mà hắn cứ đứng *lơ láo như chó thấy thóc* vậy. (Seeing a thief picking someone's pocket, he just stood there indifferently like a dog seeing grain.)
19	Những người dân làng hiếu kỳ tập trung xem chuyện gì đáng xảy ra*, ngồi như chó ngó tát ao*. (Curious villagers gathered around to see what was happening, sitting like a dog watching bailing water out of the pond.)
20	Ngồi tử tế xem nào. *Đừng ngồi xó ró như chó tiền rưỡi* nữa. (Sit properly and watch! Don't sit in a corner like a half-dollar dog!)
21	Cô ta không làm gì cả ngày. Cô ta *ngay lưng như chó trèo chạn*. (She did nothing all day. She was lazy like a dog climbing a cupboard.)

The examples above show that dogs are associated with all the bad things when used to express human personality according to Vietnamese beliefs. Therefore, the element referring to dogs in Vietnamese idioms has a large number of negative meanings. All the characteristics, personalities, and actions of this animal are associated with the evil characteristics and actions of humans.

Similarities between English dog similes and English dog similes

Dog similes in English and Vietnamese record both full equivalence (simile 14 in English and simile 6 in Vietnamese) and relative equivalence (simile 11 in English and simile 21 in Vietnamese)

Regarding full equivalence, simile 11 in English, "Dirty like a dog," has an exact equivalence in Vietnamese, "Bẩn như brochures chó." They have the same structure and meaning. In terms of relative equivalence, simile 11 in English, "As lazy as a dog," has its partner in Vietnamese, "Ngay lưng như chó trèo chạn" (simile 21), which uses the image of a dog climbing a cupboard to refer to lazy people. The similarities can be explained as follows.

Structure

As can be seen in Table 1 and Table 3, English similes use comparative structures "as…. as" or "like". In Vietnamese, similes are used with the general structure "A như B", in which A is the object of comparison, B is the comparison, and "như" (like) is the word expressing the comparison relationship (marker). Thus, comparative idioms about dogs in English and Vietnamese are similar in terms of structure. The compared part can be a verb or an adjective. The comparative clause is the word "dog" or an expression or phrase with the image of a dog.

Meaning

As can be seen in Table 2 and Table 4, as a unit with an identifying function, similes also have the phenomenon of multiple meanings. With similes, multiple meanings appear in the images in part B. It can be affirmed that the images are symbolic and themselves create multiple meanings for similes. For example, the English simile "Like a dirty dog" literally means dirty, which figuratively means hideous and despicable. The Vietnamese idiom "Dirty as a dog" also has these two meanings. There is a similarity in the meaning of English and Vietnamese similes. Both English and Vietnamese similes used in this study can be used in both literal and figurative meanings, in which the original meaning is meaningful words and expressions. English and Vietnamese similes originate from people's experiences, from things they have seen and heard, so their origin can be understood based on language. This is very meaningful when translating similes from English to Vietnamese or from Vietnamese to English because just translating according to the original meaning is enough to understand one aspect of the simile's meaning.

Differences between English dog similes and English dog similes

The differences between English and Vietnamese similes with dog images can be grouped into the zero equivalence category, which accounts for most selected similes (19/21). The detailed analysis can be seen as follows.

Structure

As can be seen in Table 1 and Table 3, while the English similes use the words "like" and "as" to connect the comparative clause with the compared clause, the Vietnamese similes only use the word "như". In many other kinds of similes, the number of words used for comparison is relatively diverse: bằng, như thế, tựa, tày... However, in all 21 dog similes found in this research, only one comparison word is recorded: "như". Another structural difference between English and Vietnamese similes is that while the comparison clause with the image of a dog in English similes is just words and phrases, in Vietnamese, it also records a majority of clauses (14/21 similes). E.g.: Cằn nhằn như chó cắn ma (Nagging like a dog biting a ghost), Lơ láo như chó thấy thóc (Negligent like a dog seeing grain) …

Meaning

Table 2 shows that among the 21 dog similes surveyed in English, 38% have positive meanings, and 62% have negative meanings. Meanwhile, of the 21 similes surveyed in Vietnamese, Table 4 reveals that 100% of similes have negative meanings. This can be explained as follows.

In the culture of most Western countries, a dog is like a friend, a confidant that people can rely on when they are lonely. Dogs are trained as officers, some are given the rank of colonel, and a warrior-style funeral is held when the dog dies. Dogs are also trained to serve human life, such as crime-catching dogs, drug detection dogs, and dogs used to test newly produced drugs. A dog can have a mansion and enough servants, its own food, including its own doctor. Old dogs can be raised for old age, so there is no need to starve, torture, and kill them if they do not want to be prosecuted by the law. This comes from the notion that dogs are friendly, loyal, and

intelligent animals with many good characteristics. Therefore, the image of a dog in English proverbs and idioms is often associated with good things. However, in English proverbs and idioms, there are a few sentences related to "dog" referring to bad, terrible, and painful things. (Lê Thị Minh Thảo, 2014)

In Asian culture, the dog is considered as an animal for meat, hunting, and housekeeping. For Vietnamese people, the dog is quite close, but from a certain angle, the dog is still only considered a guardian animal or an animal to be slaughtered and processed into a favorite dish. There is also a village specializing in Nhat Tan dog meat. According to Dang Thi Thu Hien (2006), in the treasury of Vietnamese proverbs and idioms, there are at least 70 sentences with the image of a dog. The image of a dog in Vietnamese idioms and proverbs is often associated with bad, unlucky or disrespectful things in society. For example: "stupid as a dog," "dirty as a dog," and "humiliated as a dog." In the treasure trove of Vietnamese similes, the ones about dogs take up a very large part. By studying the semantics of dogs in Vietnamese similes, we can see many wonderful, interesting, and subtle things about the nation, as well as our ancestors' cultural characteristics and aesthetic views, which were summarized many generations ago. Through a survey of the dictionary "Vietnamese proverbs, idioms, and folk songs" by Vu Ngoc Phan (2005), we found that words referring to dogs appear with a frequency of 72 times, favoring negative perception, followed by a neutral meaning and a few idioms have a positive meaning. According to Vietnamese beliefs, dogs appear with all the bad things when used to express human personality. That's why the elements referring to dogs in Vietnamese idioms appear to have a large number of negative meanings. All characteristics, personalities, and actions of this animal are associated with humans' evil characteristics and actions.

Thus, dog in Vietnamese and dog in English conveys the same conceptual meaning, but the connotative meaning of the word "dog" in each language is different.

Discussion

The findings of this study are relevant to many other studies exploring the cross-cultural gaps between the two languages in terms of structures and meaning. The study by Phuong Vu Mai (2024) is devoted to the exploration of similarities and differences between the use of idiomatic similes in English and Vietnamese. Based on the grounds of this contrastive analysis, some recommendations for teaching and learning similes within the EFL context will be proposed and discussed. Phuong Vu Mai (2024) shows that the main difference between English and Vietnamese similes lies within two categories: same topic but different vehicle and same vehicle but different topic. Some idiomatic similes in English and Vietnamese may contain the same lexical component as the source domain, which actually refers to different topics with different content values and vice versa. Therefore, she concluded that there is a widespread agreement that idiomatic similes mainly originate from the observation and connection people make during their daily lives and labor. Cultural background should be considered in explaining how the same values of content are expressed via different images in English and Vietnamese similes.

Another research by Nguyen Nhat Quang (2020) is based on cross-cultural features and semantic analysis and aims to point out the similarities and differences between English and Vietnamese determination proverbs. This research can explore the cross-cultural gaps between the two languages in terms of proverbs' referents. Regarding semantics, both Vietnamese and English determination proverbs contain two main categories: proverbs with figurative and without figurative language. Besides, regarding syntactic structures and no-trope proverbs,

numerous proverbs in English and Vietnamese are in the form of negative structures. Vietnamese and English bear some striking resemblances in terms of socio-cultural use of referents. They all take inspiration from a wide variety of objects and phenomena that are easily encountered in daily life. Vietnamese and English skillfully use many combinations of figurative language to increase practicality and liveliness, which helps increase memorization. In contrast, each language's proverbs also possess many characteristics that differentiate them, namely, the levels of preference over the image chosen and the recognition of a proverb. While it is easier to recognize a proverb of determination in English, it requires more effort to consider if a Vietnamese saying is a proverb or an idiom. In terms of semantics, one noticeable feature is that English proverbs particularly like to "de-humanify" human subjects as they usually compare human beings with concrete objects or use verbs that collocate with non-human objects. This method is hardly adopted in the Vietnamese proverbs. On the other hand, Vietnamese proverbs tend to present paradoxes where human power overtakes the hindrances, which is not encountered in English proverbs. Therefore, it can be concluded that the differences between English and Vietnamese determination proverbs outnumber the similarities.

Causes of the differences

As stated above, language is an important means of helping native speakers store the results of their perceptions and experiences. Therefore, the appearance of gaps in one language compared to another is obviously related to the characteristics of native speakers' practical activities and experiences. In addition, the meaning layers of words are closely related to elements of national culture such as religion, myths, history, customs, and the geographical environment where native speakers live.

Geographical environment factors

It is worth noting that most of the similes have animal names, in addition to the literal and symbolic meaning, the rhetorical nuance is very clear, which is ridicule, disparagement, and contempt. If in the idiom about the dog, we explain that the above-mentioned person's evaluation partly comes from the reality of life and the characteristics of the animal, then with some other useful animals, we cannot find the cause. The objective causes that lead to negative nuances in idioms are all due to the conception of native speakers. The geographical environment can influence the differences in comparative dog idioms in English and Vietnamese through factors such as culture, geography, and the way people interact with dogs in each cultural background.

In Western countries, in cultures where dogs are often kept in the home and as companions, similes may reflect this close relationship. For example, "as faithful as a dog" is a common idiom in English. In Western societies, dogs are often considered part of the family; therefore, relations with dogs are often emotional and close.

In Vietnam, a country that values agriculture and considers the buffalo as the most important in their life, the dogs do not play a vital role. Especially in rural areas, where dogs are often used for agricultural or protection purposes, idioms can reflect humans' different experiences with dogs. For Vietnamese people, although dogs are the closest pets in the house, closer to humans than other animals such as pigs, chickens, buffaloes, cows, etc., they do not seem to be considered as human friends.

Custom factors

Due to different living customs, different ethnic groups obviously have cultural differences in cognitive values as well as aesthetic standards. The animal with different cultural symbols

between British and Vietnamese cultures is probably the dog. British people have a long tradition of keeping pets. In particular, domestic animals such as dogs and cats are close friends, loved and cherished. The British associate human behavior with the image of a dog. They can say you are a lucky dog, a top dog… In Vietnam, dogs are also pets and close friends to humans, but in their eyes, the dog is more known as an unsympathetic, dirty, ignorant, despicable animal and an object of contempt. In language use, Vietnamese people can insult each other with words such as mother dog, hunting dog, mangy dog, street dog…

Implication on translation and language teaching

Implications on translation

As we can see, there are several things we need to be aware of even though similes make up a very minor portion of the language. Similes in Vietnamese and similes in English differ greatly, save from a few striking parallels and coincidences that facilitate translation. Alternative interpretations can be derived from the same comparison image, and numerous alternative images can represent the same idea. Similes with distinct national identities that include human elements significantly challenge translation and interpretation. The English translation of "As stupid as a dog" should be "As stupid as a donkey". For Vietnamese people, it is just "wrong" and pointless. Those uncomfortable, unnatural translations must be avoided at all costs. For better translations, especially when it comes to comparative idioms, several points need to be considered.

To begin with, due to the diversity of cultures among countries, language discrepancies often stem from these cultural variations. Therefore, translators must recognize the imperative of thoroughly understanding the culture to produce accurate translations. Acquiring proficiency in other cultures is undeniably challenging and time-consuming. However, what truly matters is developing a broad and profound awareness of cultural disparities, which can help prevent awkward and subpar translations while enhancing one's translation skills. Ly (2022) observed that English texts frequently employ metaphors, slang, similes, and idioms, causing confusion among Vietnamese learners attempting to grasp the figurative or implied meanings within these texts. Consequently, they tend to translate the text literally, as they fail to discern the author's true intent.

Moreover, encountering unfamiliar concepts, particularly differing perspectives or challenging idioms and expressions, is inevitable in translation. The key lies in maintaining an open mind to embrace foreign thoughts and beliefs, empathizing with their emotions, and echoing their words. It's essential to meticulously consider the context, circumstances, or situations to infer and convey the accurate meaning. Relying solely on word-for-word translation, especially with idiomatic expressions, is ill-advised, as idioms constitute distinct semantic units whose overall meaning transcends the sum of their parts. In addition, translating requires a great deal of flexibility. Translators frequently have to decide whether to translate something literally or, where required, modify it to provide a more accurate and agreeable translation.

Implications of language teaching

It is clear that successful foreign language acquisition frequently requires a strong command of one's original tongue, so it is critical to support a student's mother tongue ability. Students may often translate too literally or oversimplify from their source tongue to the target language without fully appreciating the subtle differences between the two, leading to embarrassing expressions and misunderstandings. Furthermore, cultural differences frequently provide serious difficulties, especially when it comes to idioms and similes, which impairs pupils' understanding. Therefore, in addition to teaching language proficiency, teachers should also

impart a thorough awareness of the culture linked to the target language. It is important to consistently raise pupils' knowledge of the differences in culture and society between the two languages and nations.

Moreover, teachers need to help students learn idioms, especially similes, so they can use them with assurance and appropriateness in everyday and academic settings. Teaching similes involves a number of important factors. First and foremost, teachers need to hold students' interest while raising their knowledge of the similarities and differences between similes in Vietnamese and English. It is best to start with exactly the same similes, go on to ones that are slightly similar, and then provide those that differ greatly. Students should try to explain the literal meaning of the English similes, then guess their figurative meaning before the teacher provides the simile's origin and metaphorical meaning by linking them with specific situations and asking students for the equivalent similes in Vietnamese. Second, because there are so many different types of similes in Vietnamese and English, it is not possible to teach them all. Instead, teachers should carefully choose which idioms to teach, emphasizing English idioms that are widely used and free of ambiguity or intricate grammatical structures. Thirdly, teachers can organize similes into different groupings related to animals, nature, colors, and activities to make the learning process more efficient.

Finally, in addition to instructing students on similes, it's crucial to encourage their application in both spoken conversations and written compositions. The teacher should lead by example in this regard. As discussed earlier, similes, with their symbolic and figurative meanings, contribute to the richness and emphasis of language, rendering every interaction more captivating and dynamic. In a study by Ghaemi (2022) investigating phraseological units in IELTS academic writing task 2 and candidates' perceptions of phraseological competence, it was observed that similes were absent. Moreover, the sole instance of a proverb's usage by a candidate with a low band score (band 4) had a detrimental impact on the assigned score, resulting in a deduction of marks.

Conclusion

Culture has a powerful influence on language, and language plays an honest and prominent role as a mirror reflecting culture. There are many similarities and differences between English and Vietnamese similes about the dog, mainly due to cultural differences. The same comparison image can sometimes lead to different meanings and vice versa, the same meaning can be expressed by many different images. Studying similes in two languages really helps gain a lot of valuable things, including increasing knowledge of idioms, a better understanding of culture, and improving research ability as well as language contrasting methods. Furthermore, after the research, many good points were drawn that can be applied to language teaching and translation.

This article has analyzed and discussed the cultural symbolism present in the similes referring to dogs in Vietnamese and English by comparing dog images and their cultural symbols. The analysis results show that the words for animals of each language have unique cultural characteristics due to the influence of factors such as geographical circumstances and customs. Besides, the semantic symbols of similes with dog elements in Vietnamese and English both have interesting similarities. Understanding the semantic characteristics of words for dogs in English and Vietnamese similes contributes to discovering new things about the two nations' life, customs, practices, culture, and thinking. It also helps us see humans' sophistication and wonderful creativity when perceiving animals in general and the image of dogs in particular.

In short, in this study, from the interface between language and culture perspective, we present some features in the use of dog images in Vietnamese similes compared with English. While the image of a dog appearing in English similes has both positive and negative meanings, in Vietnamese similes it only has negative meanings. According to Pham Ngoc Ham (2018), the backward and fragmented agricultural production system and continuous natural disasters are common in the Asian community. In the past, eating well and being warm was the dream of many generations of people. In that context, dogs in the eyes of Eastern people, especially China and Vietnam, also have characteristics that reflect historical imprints.

Limitations

As it is virtually impossible to find a dictionary or a corpus that synthesizes all the existing Vietnamese and English similes, this study, albeit against the authors' will, cannot account for all the dog similes in both languages. Also, the author cannot cover all linguistic and cultural aspects of Vietnamese and English dog similes within this article. Also, there are no previous studies about determination proverbs from the cross-cultural contrast analysis perspective to confirm or elaborate more on our research findings.

Suggestions for future research

First, further studies can focus on other linguistic forms. Dog similes reflected in poems, moments on social networks, or daily communications can be recruited as the subjects for a cross-cultural comparison. Second, this study compares two cultures that are considered to be quite different in terms of cultural dimensions. Future studies can focus on the differences in dog similes between Vietnamese people and people from a culture similar to Vietnamese, like Chinese.

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